

Iran sees tourism as nat'l asset to tackle economic, social challenges: *Deputy minister*

Arts & Culture Desk

Tourism could offer the country a "low-cost, high-return" path out of economic and social challenges, said Deputy Tourism Minister Anoushirvan Mohseni Bandpey, on Monday. He made the remarks during a joint meeting with senior officials at the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts in Tehran, IRNA reported. Tourism, he stressed, is one of Iran's few industries capable of generating income, jobs, and social cohesion without heavy state intervention. He called it a "national advantage" and a critical driver for economic resilience

and long-term sustainability. "This is the only industry that creates jobs, earns income, and builds identity all at once," Bandpey said. He urged policymakers to take a scientific, targeted, and inclusive approach to tourism, positioning it as both an economic engine and a tool for cultural diplomacy. While acknowledging the sector's vulnerability to geopolitical crises and international sanctions, Bandpey dismissed them as threats. "These are not threats but chances to rethink, innovate, and create local models for tourism management," he said. Bandpey underscored the need for

"creative decision-making" and warned against a passive stance. Instead, he called on the ministry to take the lead in forming national tourism strategies. Engaging universities, the private sector, and civil society would unlock new horizons, he said. Investing in tourism, especially under current economic strains, is "not a cost but a chance to build national wealth and renew social hope," he added. He closed by urging a nationwide consensus and "smart governance" to turn Iran's vast cultural, historical, and natural heritage into the "flag-bearer of national development" and a symbol of economic resilience.



Iranian film 'Under the Shady Oak' wins top jury prize in Bulgaria



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Iranian short film 'Under the Shady Oak', written and directed by Hossein Allahyari, won the Special Jury Prize at the 22nd edition of Bulgaria's In the Palace International Short Film Festival. The Oscar- and Goya-qual-

ifying festival, held from June 28 to July 5 in Bulgaria, praised the film's "haunting atmosphere" and "powerful visuals," calling it a deeply resonant exploration of family tensions and generational legacies. The win marks the film's international debut, IRNA reported. Founded in 2003, In the Pal-

ace has become one of Europe's leading platforms for young filmmakers and professionals in the short film circuit. The jury described 'Under the Shady Oak' as "a sensory and immersive experience" and a "symbolic narrative of endurance, sacrifice, and the unspoken bonds across generations." Allahyari's film had already made waves in Iran, winning Best Film, Best Screenplay, and Best Sound Design at the 41st Tehran International Short Film Festival. It also received the National Will Manifestation Award at the 43rd Fajr Film Festival. The cast includes Amin Sha'rbaf, Fathollah Taheri, Yousef Safari Bakhtiari, Morteza Alidadi, Sepas Rezaei, Sima Sadeghi, and Parham Gholamloo. International distribution is handled by Cinerama, led by Neshat Bagheri.

Islamic carpets show Silk Road ties at Hong Kong Palace Museum

Arts & Culture Desk

Nearly 100 rare Islamic artifacts, including silk carpets woven for royal courts, is on display at the Hong Kong Palace Museum in a major collaboration with the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA) in Doha. The exhibition, which runs through October 6, explores centuries of cultural exchange between Islamic and Chinese civilizations, ILNA reported. Titled 'Wonders of Imperial Carpets: Masterpieces from the Museum of Islamic Art', the show marks the first comprehensive presentation in Hong Kong of "imperial Islamic carpets" and related objects from the 16th to 18th centuries. It highlights the cross-cultural flow of materials, patterns, and craftsmanship driven by diplomacy, trade, and migration along the Silk Road. On display are opulent silk and gold-thread carpets, along with manuscripts, ceramics, jade, and metalwork—many on loan from MIA, and others from the Beijing Palace Museum and HKPM's own collection. Some of the items are being shown outside Qatar for the first time. "This exhibition offers tangible evidence of artistic interaction," said Mounia Chekhab Abudaya, MIA's deputy director of curatorial affairs. She pointed to the enduring influence of the Safavid, Mughal, and Ottoman dynasties, all of which had close ties with China that shaped their aesthetics and techniques. Despite clear distinctions between Islamic and Chinese visual traditions, she noted "remarkable points of con-



vergence." Islamic court carpets were typically woven from luxury materials like silk and gold thread, with intricate geometric, floral, or figural designs. Similarly, carpets made in China's Xinjiang region during the Qianlong era featured ornate floral motifs and were crafted for imperial use. Curators say the show is not just about textiles—it's a broader testimony to centuries of cultural give-and-take between East and West. The Silk Road, long a lifeline for ideas and artistry, is once again in the spotlight.

Dust blankets Tehran; officials urge emergency measures

Social Desk

Tehran's air quality remained unhealthy on Monday, July 7, as airborne dust blanketed the capital for a fourth straight day, prompting health warnings from both public health experts and the Department of Environment. According to the Tehran Air Quality Control Company, the Air Quality Index (AQI) hit 156 Monday morning — a level considered "unhealthy for sensitive groups," including children, the elderly, and people with respiratory or cardiovascular conditions, IRNA reported. The 24-hour average reached 182, marking a stretch of increasingly toxic days for the city's nearly 9 million residents. The root cause of Tehran's dust problem has been attributed to the drying up of reservoirs in the south of Alborz and southwest of Tehran, exacerbated by strong winds. Mohammad Nouri-Sepehr, a faculty

member at Alborz University of Medical Sciences, called fine dust particles "a silent threat" to public health and urged both local and cross-border action to address what he called a "growing environmental crisis." He warned that the particles — mostly between 2.5 and 10 microns — are small enough to penetrate deep into the lungs and exacerbate asthma, bronchitis, and heart disease. "Human health hinges on environmental health," he said, calling for a public awareness campaign and multi-agency intervention. Tehran has already recorded 31 days of "unhealthy air" for sensitive groups this year, in addition to three days rated unhealthy for all populations and one "very unhealthy" day, according to official data. Last year, the city experienced just seven days of "clean" air, while the remaining days were either moderate or harmful. Hassan Abbasnejad, Director General of Tehran's Department of Environment,

echoed the alarm and cited meteorological reports predicting more dust from both local and trans-regional sources through Thursday, July 10. He urged residents, especially pregnant women, seniors, and those with chronic conditions, to stay indoors as much as possible and avoid physical activity during peak pollution hours. "Close windows, limit driving, and avoid open flames," he advised, warning that the incoming dust would reduce visibility and increase airborne particle concentrations. Tehran is not alone in its struggle with dust storms. Cities in Iran's west and southeast have long faced even more critical conditions. Authorities are also asking the public to limit personal vehicle use and refrain from actions that may worsen air quality. Mobile air monitoring stations continue to assess pollution levels across the city, with updated advisories issued when thresholds are breached.



Experts say controlling the domestic origins of dust storms — including dried-out wetlands and overgrazed land — must go hand-in-hand with regional cooperation.

"Curbing cross-border dust sources requires diplomacy and environmental agreements," Nouri-Sepehr said, warning that failure to act could leave vulnerable populations increasingly exposed.